

Letter to the The Palm Beach Post

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More than seven years after the United States began Operation Iraqi Freedom, American combat troops are exiting Iraq. The successful end to the combat chapter of this conflict is a reason to celebrate, and the credit goes to our brave men and women in uniform and to the surge strategy that has allowed our troops to return victoriously.

Four years ago, the mission in Iraq seemed lost. Our war fighters performed valiantly, but they were up against an enemy that used terror and indiscriminate violence not just to gain small victories on the ground but to turn the tide of public opinion, within Iraq and here, against the war.

When President Bush announced the troop surge, planned and orchestrated by Gen. David Petraeus, I believed that it was our last chance to win the war. Although I was not in Congress, I was proud that Americans stood up to support Gen. Petraeus and our troops. Looking back, we remember many in Congress believed that there was nothing we could do to win the war. They called for immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, a strategy that would have allowed Iraq to become a terrorist state dominated by chaos and violence.

Shortly after the surge went into effect, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., declared the strategy a failure, while Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., claimed "this war is lost." Vice President Joe Biden, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, authored a resolution opposing the surge.

Fortunately, Gen. Petraeus and our war fighters did not listen to the detractors. For as we all now know, the naysayers were dead wrong. Thanks to the dedication and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform and the strategy developed by Gen. Petraeus, the situation in Iraq turned around. Violence declined precipitously, Democracy is taking root, and Iraqi troops have taken over roles previously performed by Americans.

I commend President Obama and our troops for carrying out the status of forces agreement with Iraq. I pray that the Iraqi government seizes this opportunity for self-determination based in freedom and becomes a partner in peace and an ally in the Middle East. When our combat troops leave Iraq this week, 50,000 troops will remain to train Iraqi forces and support the government. There is much work to be done, albeit in a much different role for the U.S. We must help form a strong, democratic Iraqi government that will preserve the success our troops have worked with the Iraqi people to achieve.

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Washington

Editor's note: Tom Rooney, R-Fla., represents the 16th Congressional District.